

Libby Watson, Assistant City Manager, Fort Worth, Texas

Libby Watson serves as the Assistant City Manager for the City of Fort Worth. She manages and directs the departments of Public Health, Municipal Courts, Environmental Management, Police, and Fire.

Prior to joining the City of Fort Worth team, she was an Assistant City Manager for the City of Austin, Texas. (July 1986 - Sept. 1989). She was appointed the Financial Management Director for the City of San Diego, California in June of 1982 after serving in various positions in the Financial Management Department beginning in 1974.

She received her Masters in Public Administration from San Diego State University and has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California. She is active in Girl Scouts and currently serves on the Finance Committee of the Circle T Council Board of Directors, and the Public Health Steering Committee of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth. She is also a member of the Leadership Development for Integrated Emergency Response Advisory Board at Texas A&M, the George Bush School. She has chaired the First Texas Camp Fire Council's Corporate Champions for Children Task Force.

Ms. Watson is a native Texan, born in the City of Fort Worth.

Statement of
Libby Watson
Assistant City Manager of Fort Worth, Texas
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United States House of Representatives
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Good morning. I am Libby Watson, Assistant City Manager of the City of Fort Worth, Texas. I manage the city's Public Health and Safety activities and I am responsible for our Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery – in today's vernacular—Homeland Security. I have worked in local government for 30 years.

I want to thank the Democratic Caucus Chairman Robert Menendez and Homeland Security Task Force Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney for inviting me today to speak from the perspective of a major metropolitan area's emergency response team. I offer you a glimpse of the realities that local governments are experiencing as we protect our homeland.

Since coming to work for the City of Fort Worth, the city I was born in, I have coordinated the local response for a number of disasters. And with each occurrence I am reminded of a line made famous by former House Speaker Tip O'Neill: "All politics are local." It applies, slightly modified, today: "All disasters are local." Whether the disaster is natural or man-made, it hits on a local level and it hurts on a local level.

In May of 1995 the City of Fort Worth suffered the devastating blows of a hailstorm that is included in the National Weather Service's "Top Ten List of Natural Disasters". During the ensuing years we experienced the summer of 1998 drought with two disastrous water main breaks in our downtown area which left us without water for our hospital district and for fighting fire in the central business district, the horrific 1999 Wedgwood Baptist Church shooting, the 2000 tornado that destroyed neighborhoods and ravished our downtown and the 2002 tornado that struck our eastside neighborhoods.

We know that in any situation it will be hours before federal or state help will arrive, so the local response must be immediate, decisive and comprehensive. Our objective is to minimize the impact and maximize the number of lives saved.

One only has to look to New York City in the aftermath of September the 11th as a vivid example of disaster abatement falling squarely on the shoulders of local responders. It was to Mayor Giuliani that the eyes of New Yorkers and the nation looked for direction out of those dark days. Today, it is the citizens and local government of New York who are still suffering the emotional and economic consequences of that horrible disaster. The effectiveness in dealing with the aftermath is attributed to the resiliency of the folks at the local level.

Local preparedness becomes the paramount ingredient in how effective we will be in preventing and responding to a disaster. And how the federal support for that effort is allocated and expressed is the issue that brings us together today.

According to a study conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, it is estimated that cities nationwide spent more than \$2.6 billion in additional security costs between September 11, 2001 and the end of 2002. At the onset of the war several months ago and when we were under a national high threat alert, costs rose dramatically, accounting for an extra \$70 million per week that cities spent on preparedness.

As federal, state and local governments build the infrastructure to protect our homeland, it is important that we learn from the lessons of our local responders and craft policy solutions in order to better pinpoint the areas of need. Let me offer five ideas on how it can be accomplished.

Direct and Flexible Funding

Federal funding must come directly to cities and have flexible applicability to cover the range of disaster responses required. There are experts at the local level. We have a lot of experience responding to disasters. We have done our homework. We discuss major purchases as a region and we know what our priorities are in order to build our capacity to make it until State and Federal assistance arrives. Send the funding straight to the locals with oversight or coordination through regional councils of government, and give us the flexibility to address our needs quickly without bogging down the process through state governments. The best way to deal with disaster preparedness and abatement is to have the resources put in the hands of local responders. This is what Congress did with the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) program.

This grant, which is given directly to large and medium-sized cities, has fostered regional collaboration and provided a mechanism to ensure that smaller, neighboring jurisdictions are taken care of. The system proved very beneficial when during the post September 11th anthrax scares our MMRS team was able to field and respond to the countless calls made about sightings of suspicious white powder.

The Local Law Enforcement Block Grant (LLEBG) is another example of a program that was designed with local needs and priorities in mind. The word *local* is even in the title and it lets local communities address their local problems with local responses that are often unique and innovative rather than routine dedicated formulas that may not solve the problem. In Fort Worth, we have addressed getting services to at-risk community members, preventing gang crime through innovative approaches and extending cooperation with Tarrant County, including setting the groundwork for technological advances in information sharing. This program works and it works because it is implemented locally.

No Grant Match

If the purpose of the homeland security monies is to address existing deficiencies in our ability to respond to the current threat, then remove the requirement for a cash match; cities are matching these funds with the lives of our emergency personnel that are being further jeopardized when we don't have needed equipment and protective gear.

Collaboration Required

Since September 11th cities and counties in North Central Texas have come together to develop regional strategies, identify deficiencies and implement solutions with existing resources. Technical committees in every discipline are working in the same direction and establishing new partnerships almost daily. Our region was among the first in the nation to complete Domestic Preparedness Assessments together as a region covering 12,800 square miles with a population of over 5.7 million people. An effort of this scale can be compared to the state of Maryland and it is only 16 of the 254 counties in Texas.

As a result we have been successful in being awarded grants but often have to wait an inordinate amount of time to receive authorization to even begin ordering equipment. Some cities are still waiting on equipment that was ordered 2 years ago through a particular state administrative agency. Communication is often inadequate from the state to locals regarding funding guidelines, which only compounds an already confusing process.

The cities and counties in our region have already pooled our funds through our COG to hire two full time people just to get our arms around the maze of stove piped funding programs being funneled through state agencies that are under staffed and overwhelmed. Deadlines set by the state are continually pushed back; the extra layer of bureaucracy definitely slows the flow of funding.

In North Texas, we have a regional plan for building an interoperable communications system. This system will connect federal, state and local public safety responders. Phase I of the plan will cost \$2.3 million, and we are currently seeking federal funding support for the effort.

Greater Coordination with Department of Homeland Security

There needs to be better coordination between the Department of Homeland Security and local communities. The role of the federal government should be that of providing coordination, communication and training. Cities need to be at the table and involved in the discussions with the federal and state governments on funding allocations and decisions. When decisions are made we want them to be consistent and fair, yet flexible enough to recognize the diverse methods for preparing a disaster response. There should also be greater cross-government trainings and a forum for emergency management leaders to maintain a dialogue and share best practices. An example of needed training is in Incident Management Systems. It should be joint training involving federal, state and local responders in a given area. In a disaster it is hard to work well with strangers – with people and organizations whose capabilities you have no knowledge of. The Department of Homeland Security could help initiate and maintain these trainings and discussions.

Be Comprehensive

Greater attention and resources need to be dedicated to the total network of the emergency response services including our public health, transportation and public works, water utilities, information technology and environmental management systems. Police and Fire Departments do not do their jobs alone. Additionally, it is essential that local hospitals and trauma facilities receive adequate resources to provide the surge capacity necessary to address any public health disaster be it terrorist in nature, a SARS outbreak or even a flu epidemic.

Conclusion

My experience in coordinating successful disaster responses has taught me that the keys to success are good communication and teamwork, planning and training, adaptability, and thorough after action critiques. The emphasis from the federal

government should be in supplying the appropriate infrastructure to meet the full range of local disaster response needs. You can do this by making funding direct and flexible; eliminating the grant match requirement; insisting on collaboration; ensuring greater coordination between the Department of Homeland Security and local government; and being comprehensive in your approach.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this distinguished body today.